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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 February 1952


MEMORANDUM FOR THE INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: SE-22: Consequences of Certain Possible US Courses
of Action with Respect to Indochina, Burma, or
Thailand

1. The attached draft estimate has been approved by the
Board of National Estimates pursuant to a final consideration
of it by the IAC representatives on Wednesday, 27 February.

2. In view of its priority, we have placed this estimate
on the agenda of the IAC meeting scheduled for 10:30 Thursday,
28 February.

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Executive Secretary

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53976-P

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

27 February 1952

SUBJECT: SE-22: CONSEQUENCES OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE US COURSES OF
ACTION WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA, BURMA, OR
THAILAND

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the consequences of certain possible US courses
of action with respect to an identifiable Chinese Communist
military intervention* in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand.

ASSUMPTION

The United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand will
join the United States in warning Communist China that the five
powers will meet Chinese Communist military intervention in South-
east Asia with military counteraction. Whether or not the four
other powers will join the US in such a warning is beyond the
scope of this estimate.

* The term "identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention"
is intended to cover either an open and acknowledged military
intervention or an unacknowledged military intervention of such
a scale and nature that its existence could be demonstrated.

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ESTIMATE

I. THE EFFECT OF A JOINT WARNING AGAINST CHINESE COMMUNIST MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

On Communist Intentions

1. We do not believe that a joint warning against an "identifiable military intervention" by the Chinese Communists in Southeast Asia would tend to provoke such intervention. If, however, the Chinese Communists contemplate an early "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia, or if in the future they should contemplate such an intervention, a joint warning by the five powers would tend to deter them. ^{1/}

2. Even in the absence of a joint formal warning, the Chinese Communists probably estimate that "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia would entail substantial risk of joint military counteraction, and that such a risk is unwarranted in view of the prospects for further Communist gains in Southeast Asia without such intervention. They may, however, discount this risk, estimating

^{1/} OIR suggests that the following sentence be added to paragraph 1: "However, if the Communist leaders conclude from Western actions and statements that the West intends to attack Communist China regardless of Communist actions in Southeast Asia, the deterrent effect of a warning would be nullified."

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that there are differences in policy among the five powers and that these powers may not be able or willing to take timely^{1/} and effective military counteraction.

3. The effectiveness of a joint warning as a deterrent would depend in large measure on Communist conviction that:

- a. The five powers were not bluffing, and were united among themselves as to the military counteraction to be taken.
- b. The five powers were actually capable of timely and effective military counteraction.^{2/}
- c. The counteraction would be directed against Communist China itself as well as toward repelling the Chinese Communist intervention.^{3/}

4. If the Communists were convinced on the foregoing points they would have to recognize that intervention in Southeast Asia would bring military counteraction, the probable consequences of which would be general war in the Far East, if not global war. It is improbable, therefore, that they would initiate an "identifiable military intervention" in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand in the face

^{1/} The State representative held the view that the Communists might be seriously concerned over the prospect of delayed military counteraction, even though they believed that timely counteraction need not be feared. The State representative therefore believed that the words "timely and" should be omitted.

^{2/} See footnote to paragraph 2 for position of State representative.

^{3/} The State representative proposed that an additional sub-paragraph be added noting the possible differences between a warning conveyed to the Communists privately and one announced publicly. Alternatively, the State representative proposed that the Assumption state that the warning discussed in this estimate is a public one.

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of a joint warning by the five powers unless, on the basis of global considerations, they were willing to accept global war or at least general war in the Far East. So far both Communist China and the USSR have shown a desire to localize the hostilities in Korea, Indochina, Burma, and Malaya. Furthermore, the favorable prospects for the success of present Communist tactics in Southeast Asia make probable a continuation of these tactics, unless because of global considerations the USSR and the Chinese Communists decide to accept grave risk of global war.

5. It is unlikely that additional signatories would increase the effectiveness of a joint warning. India would almost certainly refuse to participate in such a warning. It is improbable that Japan would take such a provocative step at this time and uncertain whether Thailand would do so. Few, if any, additional governments would join in a formal warning. Even if the Philippines, Japan and Thailand did participate the Communists would discount their adherence because of the military weakness of these countries and their existing ties with the West. The Communists would assume Chinese Nationalist support of the warning, whether or not explicitly expressed.

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Other Effects

6. A public joint warning would considerably improve the morale of the Thai and Vietnamese governments. In Burma any encouragement derived from the warning would probably be offset by fear of involvement in a conflict between the great powers and general suspicion of Western "imperialist" motives.

7. Elsewhere in East and South Asia the effect would be mixed. There would be a tendency, notable in Japan and the Philippines, to applaud this new manifestation of Western determination to check Communist aggression. On the other hand, the feeling would be widespread, especially in India and Indonesia, that the warning represented another instance of Western meddling in Asian affairs in pursuit of colonial objectives.

8. The effect of a warning on other countries probably would not be of major importance. A warning might well revive the fears in the smaller NATO powers regarding the dangers of general war or of an over-extension of Western strength in the Far East, but it is unlikely that the basic attitudes of these countries would be changed.

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9. The inclusion in the warning of the use of atomic weapons would produce a widespread and serious adverse reaction throughout the non-Communist world.

II. INITIATION OF ACTION IN THE UN AND PROBABLE UN REACTIONS THERETO

10. If identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention in Southeast Asia actually took place, the UN could probably be led to adopt countermeasures similar to those taken regarding Korea if the US, UK and France advocated these measures. Action by the Security Council would certainly be blocked by a Soviet veto, but the matter could then be taken to the General Assembly within twenty-four hours under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution. The General Assembly would probably begin by calling for a cease-fire. Were this action to be ignored (as it presumably would be), a two-thirds majority could probably be mustered for resolutions condemning Communist China as an aggressor, recommending military counteraction to repel the aggression, and setting up a unified military command (though not necessarily under the US) to that end. Most UN members, however, because of their fears of a general war, would probably not be willing to give specific authorization for military counteraction against Communist China itself.

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11. The willingness of the UN to adopt a stand against Communist intervention in Southeast Asia would be affected by the readiness of the victim to appeal to the UN. Indochina and Thailand would almost certainly be prompt in seeking UN assistance against Chinese Communist military intervention, but Burma might fail to make a timely appeal or fail to support an appeal by another UN member.

12. The degree of UN support for action against Chinese Communist aggression would hinge on various other factors. A large number of Arab and Asian countries probably would abstain if Indochina, which they regard as a French puppet were invaded. The Arab-Asian reaction might be more favorable if the victim were Burma, which has followed a policy of non-involvement. If the five powers took any countermeasures without UN authorization, support of their action would be considerably lessened.

III. PROBABLE EFFECTS OF THE EXECUTION OF JOINT MILITARY COUNTERMEASURES

Reaction of the Chinese Communist and Soviet Governments*

13. If the Chinese Communists undertook an identifiable military intervention in Southeast Asia despite a joint warning against such

* SE-20: "The Probable Consequences of Certain Possible US Courses of Action with Respect to Communist China and Korea," treats most of the material discussed in this section in more detail.

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a move, Chinese Communist planning unquestionable would have considered the likelihood of Western counteraction and would have been coordinated with the USSR. It is possible that such an intervention might be undertaken in the belief that the warning was a bluff, or at least that the countermeasures would be confined to the area of aggression. In this case the execution of forceful military countermeasures might induce the Communists to seek a settlement. It appears far more likely, however, that such an intervention would be undertaken in full recognition of the risks involved. Under these circumstances, the immediate reaction to such military counteraction would probably be an attempt to accelerate Chinese Communist military operations. The Chinese Communists would probably attempt to extend their operations to other parts of Southeast Asia and, having already accepted the danger of expanded hostilities, they might well intensify operations in Korea and seize Hong Kong and Macao. Highest priority would be given, however, to the defense of Communist China.

14. Chinese Communist defiance of a joint warning would almost certainly involve the prior consent of the USSR. The degree of Soviet aid to Communist China would depend upon (a) the nature, scope, and degree of success of the Western counteraction, and (b) the degree to which the existence of the Peking regime seemed to be jeopardized.

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If the Communist military intervention was undertaken with full recognition of all the risks involved, Soviet aid would probably include increasing commitment of Soviet air defense elements in Communist China and other areas of conflict and might be accompanied by diversionary threats in other parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. If the Communists found that such measures were proving unsuccessful in countering the five powers effort, the USSR would probably intensify its aid. This aid might well include the introduction of "volunteer" forces. It might even include the employment of Soviet forces to such an extent that a de facto war between the five powers and the USSR would exist in the Far East. If, however, the global interests of the USSR would be served by disengagement, the Kremlin would probably endeavor to end the conflict by political negotiations.

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